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THE GREAT DAY OF PENTECOST.

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CHRIST's work on earth was intensive, not extensive. He took complete possession of a few lives, but did not win the multitude. The perversity, bigotry, and shallowness of the Jews defeated every effort for the nation as a whole. Their violent hatred cut short his public ministry. At his death his followers were not many hundred in number (Acts 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:6). This was the initial state, the implantation of Christianity; and this small company of disciples constituted the germ of the Christian church.

The second stage was introduced by the exaltation of their divine Master who, made perfect through suffering, and seated at the right hand of God, became head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:20-23). Now came the extensive work. The gospel had been planted deep; it was from this time to be spread abroad. To this end Christ had promised his disciples a special endowment of the Spirit, and for this they were waiting prayerfully in Jerusalem when the great day of Pentecost came.

Fifty days after the crucifixion of Christ, and ten days after his ascension, fell this promised Jewish festival. It was originally a harvest celebration, but had come later to be regarded as an anniversary of the Sinai law-giving. This feast of Pentecost, coming at a more favorable time of year than the Passover, attracted crowds of pilgrims to Jerusalem, especially Jews and proselytes from foreign countries. This was the occasion providentially chosen for the fulfilment of Jesus' promise. The holy city was filled with earnest, devout, and large-minded worshippers of God from many lands, the disciples were expectantly awaiting the outpouring of the Spirit, and the wide world was hungry for the gospel of righteousness, mercy, and peace.

Early in the morning of this great day the Christian brethren were assembled in the upper room of the house where for ten days past they had constantly met for worship and companionship. Nothing foretokened that this was to be the day when the special effusion of the Spirit should come, though the fitness of the occasion and the expectation that the promise would be soon fulfilled may have quickened the hope of the company. Then suddenly came the Spirit visitation, attested to the senses by a loud roaring as if a mighty wind blew through the house, and symbolic light marked the disciples severally. The noise seems also to have served as a providential summons, for the devout residents and pilgrims in Jerusalem assembled hurriedly at the house of the Christians. Here they looked and listened with amazement at the manner and utterances of the inspired company. With ecstatic, incoherent outbursts of feeling and expression they were manifesting their joy in their fuller possession of the Spirit.¹ The hearers were perplexed and sought anxiously the meaning of these peculiar phenomena. An explanation was necessary.

The time for witness-bearing had come. Standing as their representatives in the midst of the Christian company, the twelve apostles, through their spokesman, Peter, addressed the interested throng about them. We can scarcely suppose that we have all that was spoken by Peter on this occasion, nor that what we have is given in his exact words, but it is reasonable to hold that the substance and the spirit of what he said have been preserved to us. He was dealing with Jews, either by birth or by adoption, and he had but one point to make—that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah who fulfilled their Old Testament prophecies and expectations. First, then, he showed them the

¹ It is probable that one of the sources from which Luke made up his account of this incident regarded the tongue-speaking as an actual address in foreign languages. In that case one would judge that a slight misunderstanding of what actually took place had crept in in the course of transmission. For tongue-speaking, so called, was a common feature of the first Christian years (Acts 10:46; 19:6; 1 Cor. 12-14), and was always emotional and unintelligible. Nor was a gift of foreign languages at all necessary, as apostles and hearers all knew either Aramaic or Greek, or both. See particularly SCHAFF, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. I, pp. 234-43; CLEMEN, *Expository Times*, Vol. X (1899), pp. 344-52.

real nature of the startling occurrence which they were witnessing. It was nothing less than the realization of Joel's remarkable prophecy (Joel 2: 28-32), that at the coming of the Messiah's kingdom God would pour out his Spirit so abundantly upon men that not only priest and prophet, but every willing person, old or young, would speak his truth and praise. But to the Jewish mind it was inconceivable that their Messiah should pass through humiliation, suffering, and outward defeat. Peter must therefore show how Jesus, meeting with this experience, could still be the Messiah. He called upon them to acknowledge the approved life of Jesus, and the testimony to his divine mission, which arose from his miraculous works. His betrayal and crucifixion, which might at first seem a stumbling-block in the way of accepting him as Messiah, were actually foreordained by God, and in them God's purpose was fulfilled, not thwarted. The Messiah by God's appointment was to be made perfect through suffering, and through a complete sacrifice of himself was to exhibit God's love, fatherhood, and salvation to men. His enemies accomplished his death, but the omnipotent Hand raised him to higher life, greater glory, and wider power. The incarnate God, giver of life, could not be subject to death. This truth, he argued, had already appeared in the psalm prophecy (Ps. 16: 8-11), for the exemption from death there set forth was clearly not David's possession, and was therefore to be true of the Messiah. And that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by actual resurrection Peter and all the Christians could testify, for had they not within the days just passed repeatedly seen him and communed with him? And by his ascension he had been exalted to the right hand of God, thence to conduct the future of his kingdom. Already a prophetic passage (Ps. 110: 1) had foreshadowed this. And now this signal visitation of the Spirit gave additional evidence that Jesus lived and cared for his disciples. He was indeed Messiah and Lord of all.

The effect of this pointed presentation of the facts and explanation of what was just taking place was immediate and general. Convinced that Peter's view was the true one, many were ready to act in accordance with it. Peter told them what

to do—told them what Jesus himself had directed (Luke 24 : 47; Matt. 28 : 19). A great number—the Acts account says about three thousand—accepted Jesus as their Messiah and Master, and became associated with the original body of Christians. Many of these new disciples were presumably from the common people of Judea and Galilee, who had sometimes followed Jesus and were much attracted by him, but who had had wrong messianic conceptions, and on that account had not accepted him. Now, in the light of his resurrection and this Pentecostal manifestation, they were fully persuaded to believe in him. Probably also many of the pilgrims who had come up to the feast became, for the first time, acquainted with Jesus, and were glad to become his disciples. These would carry back to their homes in foreign lands an account of the life and teaching of Christ, from which there would, and doubtless did, grow up groups of Christians in far distant places.

These new members of the Christian community submitted at once to the instruction of the apostles, who taught them the facts of Christ's life, the gospel principles and teachings, the relation of Christianity to Judaism, the understanding of messianic prophecy, and such other things as were needful to fit them for service in the world-wide spread of Christianity. This day of Pentecost, therefore, while it was not properly the "birthday of the church," as it has frequently been called, since that church existed previously in the company of Christ's disciples, was nevertheless an occasion of great significance. It witnessed the special divine preparation of the Christians for the extension of the gospel, and the first numerical greatness of the body of disciples. It was the historical point at which the expansive power of Christianity signally asserted itself; and so it is rightly viewed as one of the supreme moments in the progress and experience of Christianity.